AMPLIFYING AQ'S BRUTALITY

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AMPLIFYING AQ'S BRUTALITY

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ABSTRACT

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This paper assesses the efficacy of a deliberate information strategy aimed at isolating al Qaeda from mainstream Islam by showcasing incriminating evidence of its atrocities committed against Muslim civilians. It demonstrates that widespread messaging can favorably widen the gap between AQ and its support base. The author uses 3 case studies to demonstrate that al Qaeda in Iraq's tactical missteps have created opportunities for local, regional and strategic impact if amplified and resonated through a deliberate strategic communications effort. The author recommends ways to improve US SC agility in this effort.

AMPLIFYING AQ'S BRUTALITY

The U.S. has a tremendous strategic communications (SC) opportunity to hasten Al Qaeda's demise in Iraq. Senior U.S. military officers in Iraq believe that the coalition has dealt devastating and perhaps irreversible blows to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in recent months, leading some to declare victory over the group.[1] The surge in Al Anbar has provided support to the Al Anbar Awakening initiated by tribes who have turned against AQI and reclaimed their lands. Additional efforts by tribes elsewhere in Amariya and Baghdad may be on the same path.[2] At the same time polling efforts demonstrate declining support for Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda (AQ) organization across the Middle East.[3]

The challenge remains how to implement an information strategy that capitalizes on successes against AQ, so that the effort is self-sustaining and can be built upon - the cumulative effect of which hastens AQ's decline and diminishes its support base, not only in Iraq, but across the region.

Clearly, current strategies that focus on implanting the culture and ideals of the United States, have not been productive in promoting Iraqi security in the near term, and may have value only in the long run. Likewise, they have had little demonstrative effect in reducing AQ's support base, or in stabilizing Iraq. Data suggests that the U.S. policy push for democratic values may actually have had a galvanizing effect on Islamic resistance to Western ideology.[4] This opinion is echoed by many who conclude that the more the U.S promotes its goals of democracy for Muslims, the more fuel extremists have to sustain their crusader analogy and distance Islam from the West.[5]

A more effective near-term strategy might be to use US strategic communication (SC) abilities to isolate AQ from mainstream Islam through an information strategy that continually and deliberately showcases atrocities committed by AQI, especially towards Muslim innocents. This report will analyze the efficacy of such a strategy and suggest implementation recommendations that decision makers and practitioners can use.

SC is defined as focused U.S. government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of U.S. government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, themes, messages and products synchronized with the actions of all elements of national power. The military component includes information operations, public affairs, and defense support to public diplomacy.[6] A more tailored definition might be convincing neutrals to come over to your side or at least remain neutral by using truths and evidence.[7] In line with this notion, this report will reference the IO function as open military information operations.[8] Additionally, Multinational Force-Iraq (MNF-I) strategic effects efforts are included in this description. The author purposely avoids arguing the components or doctrine of SC to focus on the efficacy of a single line of effort – calling attention to AQ's atrocities.[9]

Tapping into a Growing Global Norm

Al Qaeda suffers from four strategic weaknesses: It kills fellow Muslims; it fails to connect with mainstream Muslim masses; its list of enemies is growing; and it lacks a positive vision for the future.[10] While the US should aggressively seek opportunities to capitalize on each of these on a routine basis through its SC efforts, it has not fully taken advantage of the first, most pervasive and most exploitable weakness. An

estimated 151,000 Iraqis have been killed since the end of the 2003 invasion.[11]   While some of these civilian deaths were unfortunately the result of collateral damage and sectarian violence, many of them involved Muslims killed as a direct result of Al Qaeda led or Al Qaeda inspired terror operations.[12]

Moreover, much of Iraq's sectarian violence can also be attributed to AQI's strategy of revolutionary jihad against the Shi'ites. Musab al Zarqawi devised this strategy to mobilize Sunni populations in order to protect AQI's interests in Iraq. Under his plan, if he could make the Sunnis perceive the Shi'ites as an enemy, allied to the Americans, he could preclude any unification efforts or nationalist movements which he feared would eventually isolate and undermine the jihadists.[13] The consequent sectarian fighting would challenge rising Shi'ite dominance in Iraq and defeat what he felt was the government's ultimate goal of creating a Shi'ite state. The civilian losses on both sides resulting from AQI's pursuit of this strategy, however, reveal its effectiveness and present an exploitable opportunity.

Though AQ perpetuates atrocities against civilians on a regular basis, US SC has not undertaken a deliberate effort to showcase the cause-and-effect relationship between these actions and the carnage they cause. Consequently, AQ has had great success in using its propaganda to blame the U.S. for many of the civilian deaths for which the terror network itself is responsible. Until the US develops a dedicated and agile system for showcasing the evidence against AQ, it will continue to miss out on an opportunity to exploit the terrorist organization's weakness.

The author calls attention to the terms, "amplification" and "resonation," as two components of SC efforts critical to showcasing incriminating evidence against AQ.

Amplification refers to the fusing of all relevant truthful information concerning AQ's culpability in an atrocity and is essential to providing necessary depth and detail of message. Additionally, it includes fusion of information from all sources available - open and classified - and is structured to provide a complete picture of what occurred, implications for AQ, and its impact on Muslim civilians.

Resonation includes distributing the right message to the right audiences over the appropriate medium. The message details AQ's cruelty to Muslim civilians. Audiences include Muslim populations worldwide with focus especially in Iraq and the Middle East. Mediums include a wide array of possibilities – from face-to-face contacts, to pamphlets, to international multimedia documentaries, to internet BLOG's – all with the goal of spreading word, pictures, and testimonies about AQ's atrocities to local, regional, and international audiences.

This report will analyze efficacy through three case studies where SC efforts had some degree of success. Each was a tactical occurrence providing US SC the opportunity to expose AQ's strategic vulnerability. *Al Askari Mosque* and *San Raphael* illustrate the significance of a coherent SC effort in showcasing detailed evidence that Al Qaeda murders Muslim civilians on a routine basis and without hesitation. While neither of these cases resulted in a perfect solution, which would assume perfect execution, they do show that efforts against AQ can have positive effect in contributing to security goals in Iraq, and possibly, the region. By implication, they reveal that more effort might beget greater effect. Lastly, *Al Anbar Awakening* analyzes how AQI's pattern of atrocities committed against Sunni Anbaris caused more than 23 tribes to unify against it, and offers suggestions to capitalize on this movement.

<u>Al Askari Mosque Flashpoint 22 February 2006</u>

The first bombing of the Al Askari mosque by insurgents in Samarra ignited the highest levels of sectarian violence observed in Iraq since the U.S. led invasion. Although no group took direct responsibility for the bombing, Shia blamed Sunni and retaliated in kind. In the days that followed, 22 additional mosques were attacked, including 19 Sunni mosques.[14] Iraqi death toll estimates as a result of the ensuing sectarian violence in the months that followed, were in the tens of thousands.[15]

The Al Askari mosque is one of the holiest sites in Shia Islam which comprises 10-20% of Muslims globally.[16] Its bombing affected Shi'ite populations worldwide - an estimated 130 to 190 million Muslims – with major population densities in Iran, Pakistan, India, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan and minorities in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar.[17]

Catching the Perpetrators

Iraqi Security Forces captured Abu Qadami al Tunisi, a Tunisian foreign fighter, May 20th as he and 15 other terrorists attacked Peshmergan forces at a checkpoint North of Baghdad.[18] After capture, Qadami confessed to participation in an AQ terror ring that targeted Coalition forces and that had killed hundreds of Iraqis.[19] Most significant, Qadami implicated himself in the Al Askari mosque bombing. Additionally, he admitted to murdering Atwar Bahjat, a popular Iraqi journalist, and her news crew who were covering the mosque bombing at the time.

Qadami's confession provided incriminating evidence as to how AQI planned and executed the mosque bombing. It showed that AQI would implement Zarqawi's strategy of inciting sectarian violence at any cost and that Muslim holy lands were prime targets.

Additionally, it gave insight that the attack's timing was planned while Coalition and Iraqi National Guard patrols were in the vicinity, so that they could later be blamed.[20] Qadami implicated Hathim Sabah al-Badri as ring leader of the AQI group that carried it out.

Al Badri, an Iraqi, had long ties to AQ, Ansar Al Sunna, and the foreign fighters coming into Iraq from countries in the region. According to Qadami, al Badri led the AQ ring consisting of four Saudi foreign fighters and an Iraqi.[21]

Qadami's capture implicated AQI in the mosque bombing and the sectarian violence that immediately followed and provided the SC effort a windfall: Iraqi security forces caught the AQ foreigner who came to Iraq to prosecute terrorism, murder innocents, and ruin its sacred infrastructure. It exposed AQI's plot and most importantly, identified the individuals who conducted the heinous act. Culpability lay not with local Sunnis in Samarra, but with a small ring of terrorists, comprised of foreign fighters and criminals. The question remained, could an information campaign redirect the current path away from more violence and retribution by focusing blame on AQ?

Exposing the Incriminating Evidence

The effort to expose Qadami and Al Badri was simple in theory – showcase the incriminating evidence against Qadami for the bombing of the mosque and the murder of the *Al Arabiya* crew. Then emphasize that the Iraqi court system was prosecuting him for capital offenses.[22] Additionally, the intention was to use Qadami's implication of al Badri as the AQI mastermind behind the attack, to bring him to justice.

Information Campaign

□ **Showcase Capture and Incriminating evidence against Qadami through GOI & MNFI**
   - Murder of Atwar Bahjat and her Al Arabiya news crew & mosque bombing
   - Prosecution through Iraqi court system

❏ **Implicate Hathim Sabah Al Badri as the Al Askari Mosque bombing mastermind - Initiate immediate "Wanted Announcement" - BOLO through Iraqi Government and MNFI**

❏ **Introduce that AQ directed the mosque bombing as a Strategy to incite sectarian violence and friction with Coalitio n forces**

Qadami

Al Badri

Figure 1: Al Askari Mosque Plan **23**

Coalition forces collaborated with the Government of Iraq (GOI) to share all compelling information garnered on Qadami and al Badri for GOI release to Iraqi, regional and international media. The package included facts drawn from Qadami's detailed confession and multiple intelligence reports. On 27 June 2006, Dr Rubaie, Iraq's National Security Advisor, released the evidence at a televised press conference.[24] MNF–I followed with a press conference the next day.[25] Additionally, Coalition forces supported the Iraqi effort by distributing leaflets in Salahuddin Province showcasing after-capture pictures of Qadami and wanted notifications for al Badri.

Effect of the Campaign

Across Iraq the sectarian violence that ignited from the mosque attacks made it difficult to assess anything positive resulting from the campaign. The tremendous destruction that took place during the four-month lapse between the bombing and news of Qadami's capture, predictably overshadowed AQI's role in the initial attack and any hopes of quelling the violence. It also provided a sobering lesson in the value of timeliness in these efforts. Nonetheless, the greatest measurable effect of the campaign was that al Badri went into hiding and left Samarra.[26]

Regional and international press carried the story, but coverage was overshadowed by sectarian violence. Much ambiguity remained in the information environment because some blamed the GOI and American forces for the attacks. Shi'ite leaders including Iranian president Ahmadinejad, Hezbollah's Nasrallah, Muqtada al Sadr, and others were most vocal in condemning America for the attack.[27] A US response from President Bush followed two months later, after a second attack on the same mosque. At an August press conference he remarked, "it's pretty clear – at least the evidence indicates – that the bombing of the shrine was an Al Qaida plot, all intending to create sectarian violence." [28] Al Badri, who resurfaced in 2007, likely took part in the 2nd attack, however, a U.S. airstrike killed him soon after.[29] Qadami was tried in the Iraqi court system and executed.

Unfortunately, US SC efforts to blame AQI for the mosque attack were not only too little and too late, but also competing against an environment of rapidly declining support for US operations. The mosque attack started one of the most violent periods of destabilization in Iraq which focused increasing blame on the US occupation. From February to August 2006, daily attacks doubled on average from 80 to 160. [30] Polling efforts showed that 42% of Iraqis already thought Iraq was embroiled in civil war and that only 21% of respondents were hopeful that future civil war could be avoided. [31] Lastly, 78% of those polled blamed US forces for provoking more conflict than it was preventing, and wanted the US to leave Iraq.[32]

Given the circumstances, skeptics questioned if any SC effort could possibly have improved the situation. Certainly, environmental conditions defying US credibility and trust made it more challenging to effectively discredit AQI. Widespread violence

detrimentally affected US abilities to conduct the information campaign. Tactically, it reduced freedom of movement, as well as propensity to put soldiers and marines at risk for missions other than those critically necessary. Meanwhile, US SC topics focused primarily on defending US policies and actions to improve security in Iraq - AQI's atrocities fell a distant second. AQI continually benefited from a comparative advantage over US SC efforts - Iraqi and regional public opinion was so entrenched against Western occupation, that AQI could conveniently conspire to pass blame for its atrocities to US forces, or Sunni, or Shia with little effort. The Al Askari mosque attack was a strategic success for Zarqawi.

San Raphael

The contemporaneous case of San Raphael's documents presented another opportunity where AQI provided deep insight into its operations, motives, inherent brutality, and indiscriminate killings. Coalition forces captured these documents 11 February 2006 during a raid on an AQI training camp that U.S. forces arbitrarily named San Raphael.[33] The captured documents contained a variety of letters, notes and electronic medium describing AQI operations in Al Anbar Province – all authored by AQI operatives to update their leadership.

These documents represent a small sample of the thousands of documents Coalition forces seize on a routine basis that provide evidence of AQ's atrocities.[34] Yet, these particular documents were especially significant because they described in detail a diverse range of admitted atrocities against the Muslim people of Al Anbar. Most compelling was AQI's admittance of murder and assassinations, as well as requests its

requests for further assassinations of prominent Sheikhs, Iraqi military leaders and government officials – all listed by name.

In two of these reports, the operative admits to killing 15 Muslim civilians and asks permission to assassinate eight more, as well as launch full scale rocket attacks against Albu Nimr Tribesmen and newly graduated police officers.[35] A second letter describes in detail how operatives staged the murder of Sheikh Fahdawi, leader of the reconciliation efforts in early 2006, to make it appear as if GOI or US forces killed him:

> …then our brothers attacked the field leader, the brain behind people revolting at al-Anbar in AlbuFahd, so the brothers raided his house in the middle of the night wearing the national guards uniform and driving similar cars, they took him and killed him thank god. The next morning his households and neighbors started talking to the tribe saying it was the national guards, they added that they heard some of them speaking English, meaning that the Americans are the ones who took al-Fahdawi, no one claimed responsibility for his killing, thank god. [36]

Exposing the Incriminating Evidence

The goal of the information campaign supporting San Raphael was to notify local, regional, and international audiences of the incriminating evidence contained in these documents against AQI. Coalition forces immediately alerted the GOI to the document requesting assassination permissions because the targeted individuals were likely in imminent danger. Likewise, Multi National Division forces in Anbar and Baghdad

distributed the documents and shared them with Iraqi leaders during face-to-face meetings. A concerted effort was made to inform Albu Nimr leaders. Additionally, leaflets distributed in al Anbar showcased the most provocative parts of the reports.
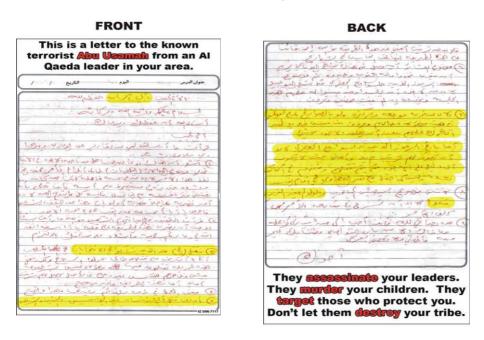
Sample Campaign Products

Figure 2: San Raphael Products [37]

MNFI provided the media a summary of the reports, as well as copies of them, during its operational update 9 March 2006.[38] Unfortunately, sectarian violence stemming from the Samarra attack and operational efforts addressing them, overshadowed interest in the San Raphael letters and what they represented, and marginalized press coverage - a single media outlet carried the story.[39]

Effect of the Campaign

In Anbar Province indications showed that the coalition's efforts to expose the documents had some favorable effect in galvanizing some of the Sheikhs against AQI.

The documents provided hard evidence of AQI's plot to murder not only Sheikh Fadhawi, but also, the other Anbari leaders who had been killed. They also showed a shift in AQI tactics towards targeted assassinations. Unfortunately, levels of violence, and competing operational priorities in Baghdad, limited distribution efforts outside of Al Anbar.

West Point's Counter Terrorism Center added the documents to their Harmony database, but outside of this and the 9 March press conference, the US made no other notable attempts at strategic resonation, likely because the documents were not considered an SC priority. The documents were unlikely to carry on their own because the narratives accompanying them were not compelling and lacked detail in describing what they truly represented.

The outcome of the San Raphael campaign shared many similarities with that stemming from the Al Askari mosque effort. Environmental factors in Iraq were the same and efforts supporting San Raphael faced the same challenges and in some cases had very similar results. However, the incriminating evidence written by AQI's own account and hand writing carried more credibility with the Anbaris than did word of mouth evidence conveyed to them by the GOI and US, as in the case against Qadami. In other words, the Iraqis believed the hand written reports. One reason was that those living in Al Anbar were experiencing AQ's atrocities first hand.

Al Anbar Awakening

The Al Anbar Awakening is the most compelling example of Muslims turning against AQ because of its ruthlessness and the US must learn from it, amplify it and resonate it to other Muslim populations. The success of the movement in Al Anbar

presents SC an opportunity to contribute to the comprehensive isolation of AQ from the rest of Islam countrywide, regionally, and perhaps internationally. A clear understanding of why the tribes turned must be recognized.

In the fall of 2006 Anbar Province was the most dangerous place in Iraq for U.S. forces and Iraqi civilians. Marine forces reported that nearly all government institutions from local to provincial levels had disintegrated and had been corrupted by AQ.[40] Rule of law was practically nonexistent. Sunni leaders allied with AQI against the Coalition as a result of the combined effects of lengthy US occupation, de-Bathification and the disbanding of a Sunni-dominated army. Toward this end, the tribes acquiesced and allowed AQI to embed itself in Anbar civil, economic, and political infrastructures.

Meanwhile, AQI pursued a horrific scourge against any opposition in which hundreds of innocent Iraqis fell victim to kidnappings, murders, and torture. Sheikhh Ali al-Hatim al Sulayman, Chairman of the Al Anbar salvation council, told of the account during an *Al Arabiya* TV interview:

> Not only were Iraqi civilians killed; they <AQ> also destroyed the infrastructure, killed the children, displaced families, and forced people out of their homes.[41]

AQI attempted to maintain social dominance by any means possible but their atrocities directly conflicted with the continuance of the tribal system. Besides killing off popular tribal leaders who opposed them, they threatened the livelihood of the tribes in three primary ways.

First, their ideology was different. AQI leaders and suicide operatives in Anbar were primarily foreigners who brought with them a distorted view of Islam that conflicted with the tribes' ideology. The Sharia law they imposed was alien to most Anbaris and it clashed with their more secular approach. Sheikh Sulayman summarized:

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They were brought to Islam by Jihad and not the other way around, therefore they had no grounding and were capable of the atrocities they committed. We put up with them to a point……The Awakening came in reaction to some erroneous practices by those who were regarded as Jihadists…But spilling blood, making random judgments, calling people infidels, cannot be tolerated by any creed.[42]

Second, they threatened tribal kinship. AQI leaders attempted to force marriages to penetrate the tribes' social fabric and gain more control through 'marriage alliances.' The Sheikhs virulently opposed marrying off their women to foreigners and violence erupted. In some cases AQI struck back at a Sheikh's family, killing his children or worse. Counterinsurgency expert, David Kilcullen, concludes that forced marriages and the string of violence they caused were the flashpoint that pushed the tribes to finally turn against AQ.[43]

Lastly, they jeopardized the tribes' authority and ability to sustain themselves. AQI destroyed infrastructure including phone centers, markets and post offices. They took over sources of revenue and commandeered businesses and smuggling efforts.

The tribes rose up from a need to destroy AQI and as their momentum continues, the story needs to be told in detail. Muslim populations everywhere should see al Anbar as an example of why Al Qaeda fails to provide a capable future. The SC challenge is to tell the story in the most effective manner – perhaps through the Sheikhs that lived through it.

The outcome of the Iraqi-led Anbar Awakening has had a dramatic affect not only on Al Anbar, but also, on spurring associated movements throughout Iraq. The Anbaris unified tribal support against AQI's atrocities in order to extricate AQI's influence from most of Anbar and force the terrorists to go elsewhere. The effect has driven AQI from the populations centers in Anbar, restricted its freedom of movement, and its ability to

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conduct large scale strikes. As a result, attacks diminished in Anbar by almost 76% towards the end of 2007.[44] With AQI's negative influence diminishing tribal leaders focused inward on rebuilding their communities. Anbaris sought to regain security by providing over 12,500 new recruits to Iraq's security forces.[45] Sunnis support to the political process which was avoided in 2002, has soared to over 86% participation.[46] In Al Anbar Province the memory of AQI's atrocities serve to remind all that Al Qaeda is the real enemy.

Significance of the Cases

These cases illustrate a diversity of outcomes that highlight significant lessons that should be considered in future SC efforts against AQI and AQ. The Al Askari Mosque and San Raphael information campaigns illustrated amplification successes on one hand (the US had the evidence and it was compelling), but resonation shortfalls locally, regionally and internationally on the other – a consequence of marginal efforts competing in a harsh environment. The unsuccessful SC effort to redirect sectarian violence after the Al Askari mosque attack, called attention to an information environment in which the truth is easily twisted and the US is subject to blame. To compete in this environment requires timeliness, agility, and depth in efforts to showcase AQI's culpability – all shortfalls in the campaign's execution.

The San Raphael SC effort took place in the same environment during the same time period, but proved more effective in its outcome. The sheikhs believed the hand-written verification of AQI's atrocities and in all probability, this proof emboldened their ongoing movement against the terrorist organization. This favorable outcome demonstrates the benefit of using detailed incriminating evidence to drive SC efforts

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against AQI. It also reveals the effectiveness of incorporating the tribal system in SC operations, and most importantly, face-to-face encounters with its sheikhs.

Both of these cases illustrate that while the U.S. has had ample opportunity to exploit AQ's missteps, it has failed to achieve full effects. The elements missing are strategic oversight, drive and ability to compete with other efforts routinely. Full effects require full participation, and the US's SC capability is much greater than just the military effort in Iraq's Green Zone. Yet in each of the first two cases, military SC capabilities provided most, if not all, of the effort and attained limited tactical effects.

The successful outcome of Al Anbar's Awakening, on the other hand, is providing momentum to other movements across Iraq, and has strong potential to influence regional and international Muslim audiences. Its success centers on the tribes' irrevocable choice to fight AQI instead of putting up with its atrocities, and that AQI posed a worse threat than did US forces. Dave Kilcullen might refer to it as an example of choice theory on steroids - whereby the Anbaris made the choice on their own without influence from the GOI or US.[47] It was completely an indigenous movement utilizing tribal structures to grow and conduct operations. Sheikhs oversaw the movement and should be considered powerbrokers in any SC efforts to amplify Al Anbar successes. The challenge will be how to capture the plight of the Anbaris and use it to show AQ's atrocities to other Muslim audiences. Regional resonation will occur to some extent through tribal affiliations beyond international boundaries, like the al Dulaymi tribe for instance, which expands into Jordan. But again, the US has an opportunity and can help this effort along.

In each of these cases, MNFI has been the lead US entity responsibility for showcasing the incriminating evidence against AQ. However, all the elements of U.S. SC including the State Department and the interagency have a supporting effort to provide, especially in resonating to regional and international audiences - all toward a common US goal of isolating AQ. The vagueness with which the truth carries in these efforts as well as its susceptibility to corruption, demand we use our best and brightest capabilities to compete. The US can not be content with treating these and similar occurrences as separate military events, to be addressed by the military for tactical effect and no more. In the war of ideas, as in the War on Terror, the outcome of the fighting in Iraq may prove pivotal to global outcomes. The US National Strategy for Iraq directs, "What happens in Iraq will influence the fate of the Middle East for generations to come, with a profound impact on our own national security."[48]

Suggestions for Improvement

While the US debates how best to conduct the war of ideas, some significant steps can be taken in the near term. First, the U.S. government must recognize the opportunity it has against AQ and prioritize its SC efforts accordingly. Next, it needs to take action to implement its May 2007 *Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*. This strategy already broadly supports isolating and marginalizing violent extremists, so the added undertaking of amplifying and resonating AQ's brutality should promptly fit as an implementing subtask.[49] Department of State (DOS), as the lead agency for US SC, should prioritize efforts pursuing exploitation of AQ's ruthlessness to civilians and be prepared to act on Iraq's many examples.

DOS can direct support to this effort as a core task for the Department's Counter Terrorism Center and its Rapid Response Unit, which have responsibility for developing and delivering proactive, coordinated USG messages.[50] The same offices should track measures of effectiveness through audience analysis that gauges preferences against AQ's ideology.

The encouraged end state is that DOS is able to oversee national efforts to echo and resonate instances of AQ brutality to regional and international Muslim audiences through the press, as well as its diplomats, surrogates, indigenous spokesmen and whatever other means it deems appropriate. The pilot countries mentioned in the 2007 Strategy may be a likely starting point to begin such a dedicated effort.[51] Additionally, DOS should consider partnering with industry to create a multimedia repository of occurrences against Muslim civilians to pull from for analysis, response, documentaries, media exclusives and sharing with partner nations. What better way to counter a Zawahiri video message calling for Jihad, than to have multimedia proof at hand, reminding audiences of the carnage AQ has caused among Muslim civilians? DOS should note that all of these recommendations will require closer work with military amplification and resonation efforts.

To improve its capability, the U.S. military should review its SC priorities and process for how it amplifies AQ's acts of brutality against civilians. Prioritizing these efforts drives bottom-up tactical and operational PA and IO efforts that can be showcased in Iraq and integrated into broader efforts against the AQ organization. As demonstrated by the cases, constancy of effort, timeliness and agility matter, as windows of opportunity close quickly.

Organizational boundaries such as those existing between IO and PA can curb

effectiveness in the amplification effort. Inevitably, information classification issues can

pose a formidable limitation to openly exposing AQI's actions, if it results in the omission

of detailed evidence. However, with care, this can be avoided. In the Al Askari Mosque

and San Raphael plans classified sources provided the evidence. Practitioners merged

classified and open information to amplify the significance of each event and AQI's

implication. Once created, plans were cleared for release at no risk to US forces.

Additionally, each plan focused on clear objectives and effects with little regard for

limitations imposed by doctrinal or bureaucratic boundaries among IO, PA, and SC; yet

crossing all of them.

Conclusion

AQ survives as long as it has a support base from which to draw its operators

and resources. With this in mind, the US needs to broaden its approach to SC and

realize the opportunity it currently has. There are two sides of the effort it should

employ in unison. The one we are comfortable with showcases American values and

freedoms through diplomacy of deeds. However, it may be a decades-long approach to

winning over Muslim populations.

The other, is a completely different approach, taking focus off the US to

showcase AQ's ideological support for persecution and brutalization of Muslim

innocents. Its goal is not to win over Muslim mainstream audiences, but to amplify the

differences they have with AQ. The US should not lull itself into false security by

sensing that it already accomplishes this task. SC that addresses Muslim audiences

with generalized talking points that happen to denounce extremism lack grounding and

credibility, especially when delivered by an American. On the other hand, presenting

factual incriminating evidence against AQ has much more play.

This paper has argued for a dedicated US information strategy to widen this gap.

More Qadami-type terrorists will be caught, more San Raphael–type documents

captured, and more AQI plots exposed during the US's stay in Iraq. US capabilities

should be ready to exploit AQ involvement as a matter of routine rather than exception.

To fail, not only misses a tremendous opportunity, but also leaves the US open to

blame.

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